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Mr. Zakharov of the UN: Soviet espionage in action

The case of Gennady Zakharov — the accused Soviet spy whose arrest prompted the KGB's seizure of Nick Daniloff — is a superb illustration of how the Soviets utilize the UN, and the fact that the UN is located in the U.S., for intelligence and espionage purposes.

It's well to remember that Zakharov, and the 500 or so Soviet nationals who work for the UN Secretariat, are in no way affected by President Reagan's new expulsion edict.

That's because Zakharov, a Ph.D in physics and former member of the USSR State Committee for Science and Technology, is not a Soviet diplomat. As an "international civil servant," he doesn't enjoy formal diplomatic immunity, but does benefit from the quasi-immunity that attends that status.

More importantly, the restrictions on travel that apply to ordinary Soviet diplomats and support staff don't apply to these UN employees. Which means that some 500 Soviet citizens and their families are free to roam anywhere in America, anytime they please.

As an aside, just imagine what it costs the U.S. government — via the FBI — simply to *try* to keep an eye on this reservoir of potential espionage agents. (The size of the FBI counter-intelligence budget is classified information).

So Zakharov, as an employee of the 'UN Center for Science and Technology for Development,' wanders around college campuses ("visiting their libraries," he says), and at Queens College, locates a third-year student majoring in computer sciences.

Zakharov explains that he's a UN official and hires the student as a research assistant — paying him in cash. Down the road a bit, Zakharov asks the student to steal unclassified microfiche from various libraries and information centers — paying even more. Then he

offers to pay for a professionally-prepared resume — to assist the student (who, by now, has graduated) in securing a high-tech job, preferably at a company engaged in military contract work for the U.S. government.

Such a job is indeed located, at a firm that manufactures precision components, for use in military aircraft engines and in radar equipment.

Zakharov then reveals that he works for the Soviets and promises that Moscow will pay for the young man's eventual graduate or professional education — if he photocopies the operating manuals for the machines his new company uses to manufacture the precision components.

By now this two-man team has crossed into the realm of industrial espionage — which often involves theft of trade secrets, but not necessarily classified information. By now, as well — however — the Queens College graduate has contacted the FBI.

In an effort to put a stop to Zakharov's activities — which are dangerous to the nation's security and very likely to lead to classical espionage — the FBI gives their new informant classified documents of no major consequence, and tells him to offer them to Zakharov.

Zakharov, needless to say, bites the bait — and, after accepting the documents on a New York subway platform, is grabbed by the FBI.

What this case demonstrates is the slow, careful cultivation of an agent — by someone able to move about freely, who also has money to spend and time to spare. An "international civil servant" like Zakharov — who, in fact, has no "job" to speak of — is the perfect spy-master for this sort of espionage.

The Post will soon present some proposals for dealing with the plague of UN-based espionage.